

Figure 11. Media Relations During Crisis.

Preparation is the key when dealing with the media at an emergency scene. Standard messages for the public in different types of scenarios should be prepared in advance. Pre-written messages can serve as the core information for a particular scenario so that only the details have to be added under the duress of a crisis. Recommendations for the transit system's media staff during an emergency include the following:

1. Send out at least a summary statement or fact sheet as soon as possible after a crisis begins. This minimizes possible disruption caused by the media trying to obtain the information on their own at the scene.
2. Ensure that enough media relations staff is at the scene to meet reporters as they arrive and to handle media requests.
3. Try to obtain information from the media. They have cameras in the field and may have prior access to some information.
4. Maintain contact with the Incident Commander at all times, even when members of the media are briefing the media.
5. Do not try to isolate the media from the emergency area. Reporters will manage to get there on their own.
6. Allow television and print photographers to get as close to the scene as possible. This must be an organized effort.
7. Consider a pool set-up if that is only way that access to the scene can be arranged.
8. Do not use danger as an excuse for keeping the media away from the response. In most cases, opportunities can be arranged for footage and pictures to be taken near the incident scene.
9. Maintain awareness of which media are at the scene.
10. Arrange opportunity for the Incident Commander to brief the media, though access to the Incident Commander should be provided prudently. A good rapport with the media during normal operations should help to minimize the media's insistence on briefings with the Incident Commander during crises.
11. Monitor press briefings and news conferences. Questions may arise that staff members can immediately begin to verify, confirm, or research.
12. Know which media are present at the briefings.
13. Ensure that all media releases are posted in the briefing area and copies are distributed to members of the media.

Because live interviews are becoming increasingly more common on television, media staff must be constantly aware that their answers are being transmitted via television to the audience. Even if the interview is being taped, remarks can be edited in a way that distorts the media specialist's intent. Thus, it is extremely important for transit media specialists to be well prepared when conducting an interview during a crisis. They should know the subject matter involved thoroughly, anticipate questions, and have a plan of action.

(continued)

Source: Critical Incident Management Guidelines, p. H-3(1).

Figure 11. Media Relations During Crisis (continued).

Media relations spokespersons should be articulate, authoritative, compassionate, polite, and honest, and should have a sense of humor. They should try to observe the following guidelines:

1. Dress appropriately, if there is time to prepare. Uniformed personnel should be in uniform.
 2. Present a clear, concise opening statement that covers basic facts.
 3. Always be pleasant.
 4. Use body language that promotes a credible and professional image:
 - Strong and authoritative voice
 - Appropriate facial expressions
 - Appropriate gestures
 - Demonstration of compassion
 - Eye contact with the entire audience
 - Natural, relaxed stance and breathing
 5. Avoid unflattering and distracting body language.
 6. Take and maintain control of the interview.
 7. Defer questions of policy to the policy makers.
 8. Stay calm, regardless of the confrontational nature of the questioners or their deadline pleas:
 - Do not rush answers.
 - Do not get flustered or defensive.
 - Think through the question being asked.
 - Buy some time on a question by giving some background information on the issue before answering the question.
 - Try to turn negatively directed questions into answers that reflect positively on the response effort.
 9. Use a straightforward manner.
 10. Stick to the news. Do not give opinions on what is interesting or important.
 11. Always tell the truth to reporters.
 12. Do not assign blame, do not estimate damage cost, and do not speculate.
 13. Never repeat a negative.
 14. Never say “no comment.”
 15. Avoid using jargon or acronyms.
 16. Never downplay any question from the media.
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Source: Critical Incident Management Guidelines, p. H-3(1).